

CASTLEMAINE NATURALIST

April 1992

NO 177

RAPTORS IN STYLE

Anne and I live on the hairpin bend in the Faraday to Sutton Grange road. Our six acre block is devoid of understory and as a result we don't, as yet, have many bush birds visiting. Hopefully we can rectify that over the years. If there is a Koori word meaning "land of the large birds" it would be perfect for us. The open spaces are full of Magpies, Ravens, Sulphur-crested Cockatoos, Galahs, Long-billed Corellas, Crimson Rosellas, and in particular, raptors.

Our verandah overlooks the valley on the eastern side of Mt Alexander. The adjoining paddocks are largely cleared, with relief being provided by the corridor of vegetation along the water race. Rabbits and various reptiles thrive. This all adds up to a wonderful habitat for raptors.

The most common is the Brown Goshawk identified by its medium size, wings held level in flight, rounded wing-tips and tail, which is often fanned. I must admit not being very good with the Collared Sparrowhawk and no doubt most of my goshawks have been sparrowhawks! Wedge-tailed Eagles are regular visitors, usually in pairs, soaring effortlessly on the thermals above the mount.

Brown Falcons seem to need to put more effort into their flight. Their upswept wings, teardrop eye, and characteristic cackling being more reliable diagnostics than their plumage, which can be very variable. They often appear in small family groups.

Little Eagles glide on wings held level, with an underwing pattern of a light stripe between darker edges. This contrasts with the similar Whistling Kite which carries its wings slightly bowed and the underwing pattern is half light half dark. The Whistling Kite generally appears alone, the Little Eagle often in pairs or larger groups after breeding.

A more irregular visitor is the Swamp Harrier, a generally dark bird with upswept wings and diagnostic white rump. It seems to fly closer to the ground than other species. I was lucky enough to see a Spotted Harrier at close quarters, but only once, and a lone Peregrine Falcon - making a total of eight species positively identified from our verandah!



I am curious as to why I have never seen any of the smaller and generally common raptors - Kestrel, Black-shouldered Kite and Australian Hobby. Does anyone have any ideas?

Any member wishing to hone their raptor identification skills would be welcome to a comfy chair and a cup of tea on our verandah at any time. Perhaps they might help be pick a male Brown Goshawk from a female Collared Sparrowhawk!

Nigel Harland.

SANDON IN FEBRUARY 1992

Birds seen drinking at the bird bath were

Scarlet Robin (pair)	Striated Thornbills	Yellow-faced Honeyeaters
Crimson Rosellas	Brown Thornbills	Spotted Pardalotes (pair)
Grey Fantail (pair)	Buff-rumped Thornbills	Magpies
Wrens	Brown-headed Honeyeaters	Grey Currawong (pair)

Birds seen on the property were

White-faced Heron	Common Bronzewing	White-th Treecreeper (pr)
Brown Falcon	Grey Shrike-thrush (pr)	Red Wattlebird
Galahs	Willie Wagtail (pair)	Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters
Kookaburra	Speckled Warbler (pair)	White-plumed Honeyeaters
Welcome Swallow (pair)	Yellow-rumped Thornbill	Diamond Firetail
Bl-faced Cuckoo-shrike	Varied Sittellas	White-winged Choughs
Rufous Whistler (pair)	Striated Pardalotes	Australian Raven

Contributed by Susanna Starr.

OBSERVATIONS

HOARY-HEADED GREBE. Large numbers (over 100) were seen on Harcourt North Reservoir on 5 March. More grebe could be seen further on. Large Egret and Spoon-bills and Great Crested Grebe were also present. (KT)

RED-KNEED DOTTEREL. Five were seen on a dam on the McIvor Highway near Junortoun on 3 Mar (EP)

BLACK-TAILED NATIVE HEN was seen on a dam near Avoca on 4 Mar (EP)

WEDGE-TAILED EAGLES. Three were seen on White-gum Road (HT).

SCARLET ROBINS have reappeared in Fryerstown (CN).

AUSTRALIAN RAVENS have been attempting to nest at Castlemaine North. Considerable noise results from this activity. (RM)

BROWN FALCONS AND LITTLE EAGLE. Four Brown Falcons and a Little Eagle were seen in the sky at the one time at Guildford. A Mudlark was in pursuit. (BP)

YELLOW-TAILED BLACK COCKATOOS. A flock of 18-20 has been seen at Little Hampton. (SB)

EASTERN ROSELLAS have been nesting each year at Fryerstown, and move in when ready to nest. However, this year they are already present. (CN)

KANGAROOS are plentiful in Fryerstown this year, and appreciate vegetable gardens. (CN)

NEW HOLLAND HONEYEATER has been feeding on a Coastal Banksia in a garden near Buda. (SP)

NEEDLETAILS. Several hundred Needletails (Spine-tailed Swifts) were seen in Fryerstown before the recent storm. (CN)

U3A/CFNC THURSDAY OUTING. 36 species were recorded at Glenluce (next to the Loddon River) and on the large dam at Vaughan. Included in the list was a female Leaden Flycatcher and a Brown Goshawk. (EP)

HARCOURT RESERVOIR EXCURSION REPORT

Bendigo Sewerage Ponds was "off" for a number of reasons so six of us took ourselves off to Harcourt Reservoir under the leadership of Maggie on Saturday 14 March. It was a still, sultry, clouded day and the water-birds were out in force but surprisingly as we all remarked afterwards, no small honeyeaters were sighted.

The bird list for the outing was

Sacred Ibis	Black Swan	Red Rumped Parrot
Little Grebe	Coot	Eastern Rosella
Crested Grebe	Moorhen	Kookaburra
Hoary Headed Grebe	Big Black Cormorant	Masked Lapwing
Great Egret	Little Black Cormorant	Welcome Swallow
White Faced Heron	Little Pied Cormorant	Superb Fairy Wren
Black Duck	Darter	Noisy Minor
Grey Teal	Black Fronted Dotterel	Magpie Lark
Musk Duck	Whistling Kite	Australian Magpie
Maned Duck	Crimson Rosella	Australian Raven

Some interesting features commented on were the number of Crested Grebes in evidence (at least six) and the rafts of Little Grebes each 50 to 100 birds strong. Could it be that when they are moulting from juvenile to adult plumage they find themselves vulnerable and group together?

Certainly there was a lot of preening going on and a wide variation in plumage shades. The Darters were also in larger numbers than expected.

Perhaps this was the last day of full summer heat.

CM.

THE CHOCOLATE LILIES

The chocolate lilies have blue-purple flowers. The sepals and petals are the same colour, so that on casual observation the flowers appear to have six petals.

Four of these lilies can be found near Castlemaine. Flower colour, number of flowers along the stalk, the total number of flowers present, the and size of the plant can vary from one plant to another, so it is not always easy to distinguish between them by casual observation.

The flowers are scented, but there is little agreement about the nature of the smell. The locally common Chocolate Lily, for example, is described by some as "chocolate scented", by others as "hay scented", and by others as "vanilla scented"

A few years ago the Chocolate Lilies were considered to belong to two different genera, but are now all included in genus *arthropodium*.

Key features to look for if you wish to distinguish between species are
-are the flowers growing singly
or in groups along the stem?

-are the filaments of the
anthers bearded or not?

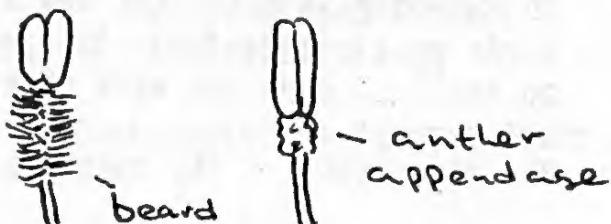
-are anther appendages present or not?
(These are more or less warty extensions at the base of the anthers)

Most people need a magnifying glass to see the appendages and beards.

In the old classification, *Dichopogon* had anther appendages and no beard on the filaments, while *Arthropodium* had beards but no appendages.

KEY TO SPECIES

- 1 Flowers solitary
- 2 Petals 4-5 mm long. Anthers without appendages *A. minus*
2. Petals 9-12 mm long. Anthers with appendages *A. strictum*
1. Flowers 2 or more in the axil of at least some bracts
 - 3 Petals 6-7 mm long. Anthers without appendages *A. milleflorum*
 3. Petals 10-12 mm long. Anthers with appendages *A. fimbriatum*



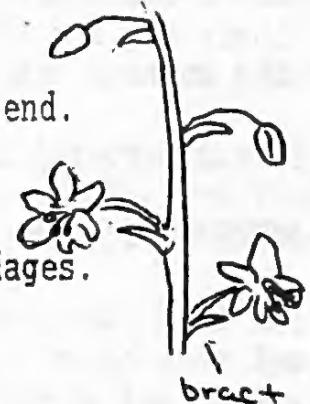
Arthropodium strictum is by far the most common of the local chocolate lilies, and can give a blue haze to the forest floor in late spring.

Chocolate Lily *Arthropodium strictum*

Usually

- it has long roots ending in tubers that taper at each end.
- it is 20-100 cm high and usually branched.
- the flowers are solitary and drooping.
- the fruit remains erect.
- the anthers are dark purple with shorter yellow appendages.
- the leaves are 20-35 cm long and 3-10 mm broad.

It was formerly *Dichopogon strictus*.



Small vanilla lily *Arthropodium minus*

Usually

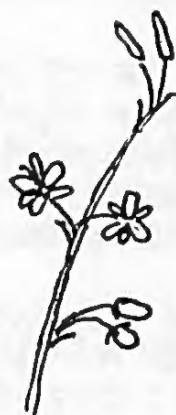
- the tuber is oblong and close to the rootstock.
- the stems are slender and less than 30 cm high.
- it is unbranched
- the leaves are usually withered by flowering time.
- it has large leaf-like bracts below the flowers.
- the flowers are solitary, (but occasionally paired).
- the flowers are drooping and purple.
- the anther is bearded.
- the filament nearly twice as long as the anther, and bearded in the upper part.



Pale vanilla lily *Arthropodium milleflorum*

Usually

- it has fibrous roots ending in ellipsoidal tubers.
- it is 20 - 50 cm high.
- the stem is branched.
- the flowers are pale white or purplish.
- the flowers may spread or droop.
- there are 2 or 3 flowers per axil on narrow stalks.
- the anther filament has dense erect hairs.
- the anther is shorter than the filament and about as long as the bearded part of the filament.



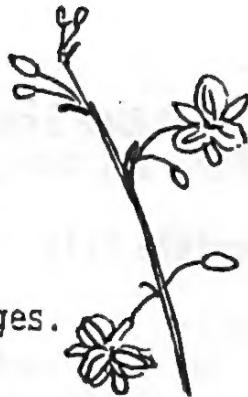
It is fairly common in wetter areas e.g. Wombat Forest.

Nodding chocolate lily *Arthropodium fimbriatum*

Usually

- it has long fibrous roots ending in tubers that taper at each end.

- it is about 40-80 cm high.
- it is usually unbranched.
- the leaves wither early, and are less than 7 cm long and 1-2 mm wide.
- the flowers are blue or violet, and drooping.
- there are 2-4 flowers in each axil.
- the anthers are dark purple with short, purple appendages.



It was formerly *Dichopogon fimbriatus*

SURVEY OF THE FOOD OF PIED CURRAWONGS

The Bird Observers Club of Australia is inviting assistance in finding out more about the food eaten by flocks of Pied Currawongs during their autumn and winter wanderings.

Particularly because Pied Currawongs are recorded regularly taking nestlings and small birds in their varied diet, some people have expressed concern at seeing the build up of Pied Currawongs during the colder months. One biologist has estimated that there has been a population increase from three million birds in the mid 1960's to between five and six million today. Additionally, there has been an extension of their range in suburban areas of widely separated cities in eastern Australia.

Are Currawongs considered "good" if they take nestling starlings and "bad" if they take Grey Fantails? Are Pied Currawongs now nesting frequently in the towns as well as their traditional sites in nearby higher mountain ranges?

One suggestion is that the spread of introduced shrubs with berries has assisted Pied Currawongs to survive in large numbers during winter. While a short term survey will not provide all of the answers, the Bird Observers Club hopes that it may shed some light on the matter and encourage birdwatchers to be more aware of how their local birds live.

Pied Currawongs visit Castlemaine each year, and seem to prefer the north end of the town. Their presence gives us a chance to take part in the survey. Can you help? Observations can be given during report time at meetings, or given to a committee member.

QUESTION CORNER

Q. What is the name of the myrtle that gave Myrtle Creek its name?

A. During last century, the common name of plants had not been standardised. The actual common name thus often varied from place to place, and often plants were given names corresponding to an English plant to which

it showed some resemblance.

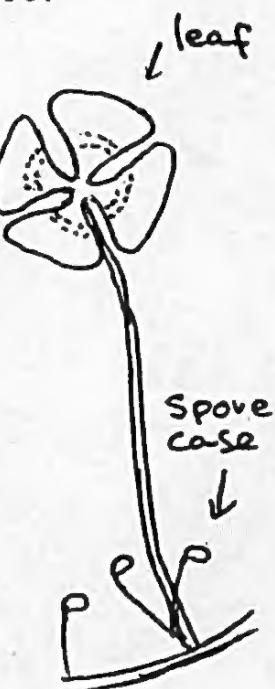
Most of Myrtle Creek is now degraded, but the remnants found along some stretches, and past records, suggest a once varied and interesting flora. Some possibilities are

- Common Fringe-myrtle (*Calytrix tetragona*). Although this species grows in the district, it is usually growing away from creeks.
- Tea-tree. It is likely that species such as Burgan (now *Kunzea ericoides*) or River tea-tree (*Leptospermum obovatum*) or Woolly Tea-tree (*L. lanigerum*) occurred along the creek. These were sometimes, in the past, called "myrtles".
- However, the creek may be named after a person called Myrtle.

Q. What are the flowers of Nardoo like?

A. Nardoo is a fern, and so does not have flowers. Most ferns produce spores on the back of the leaves. In the Nardoo, the spores are produced in separate capsules (called "sporocarps"). These were collected for food by the aborigines. The sporocarps are quite small, so a considerable effort would be needed to collect enough for a meal.

Nardoo has the leaves that look rather like those of a four-leaf clover. It is widespread in swamp areas. Locally it is found at Bells Swamp, Tullaroop and Harcourt North Reservoirs.



ASTRONOMY NOTES.

April is a good month to see Mercury. Look for it 45 minutes before sunrise in the eastern sky. On 5 April, Mercury will be 2 degrees from the much more brilliant Venus. Later in April, Mercury will appear to move further from the Sun and by 23 April will be 27 degrees above the horizon at dawn.

MISTLETOES RECORDED FOR THE CASTLEMAINE DISTRICT

The mistletoes of the district, in approximate order of abundance are

Box mistletoe (*Amyema miquelii*). Widespread and common.

Wire-leaf mistletoe (*Amyema preissii*). Castlemaine and Harcourt.

Creeping mistletoe (*Muellerina eucalyptiodes*). Red gums on Calder Hwy.

Grey mistletoe (*Amyema quandang*). Common in Harcourt.

Drooping mistletoe (*Amyema pendulum*). Southern districts.

Harlequin mistletoe (*Lysiana exocarpi*). Maldon. Rare in our district.

Buloke Mistletoe (*Amyema linophyllum*). On Buloke west of Baringhup.

CASTLEMAINE F.N.C. PROGRAM

Fri 10 April. MISTLETOES. Talk by Malcolm Calder. 8 pm at High School.

Sat 11 April. MISTLETOE EXCURSION. Excursion to Gaash Road to Maldon. 1.30 pm from SEC, Mostyn St. Leader is E Perkins.

Thurs 16 April. THURSDAY EXCURSION. Joint CFNC/U3A birdwatching excursion. Meet Cont Ed car park, Templeton St at 9.00. Leader K Turner.

Thurs 30 April. BUSINESS MEETING 7.30 pm at 38 Campbell Street. Note that this is the 5th Thursday.

Fri 8 May. CHILE. Talk by Helen Conn. High School at 8 pm.

Sat 9 May. MT ALEXANDER KOALA PARK A walk through the new koala park. Meet at 1.30 pm at SEC, Mostyn St, or 1.45 pm at Koala Park entrance. Leader is R Mills.

Thurs 21 May. THURSDAY EXCURSION. Joint CFNC/U3A birdwatching excursion. Meet Cont Ed. car park, Templeton St at 9.00 am. Leader E Perkins.

Fri 12 June. DESERT WANDERINGS AND DESERT PLANTS Talk by John Lindner.

Sat 13 June. BULLARTO RESERVOIR. Fungi and birds. Meet SEC, Mostyn St at 1.30 pm. Leader is E. Perkins.

Fri 10 July. LAMINGTON NATIONAL PARK.

Fri 14 Aug. WILDFLOWERS AND BIRDS OF CENTRAL AUSTRALIA with Chris Morris

MEETINGS: Second Friday of each month (Jan excepted) at Castlemaine High School at 8.00 p.m. Business meetings on the fourth Thursday (5th Thursday for April 1992) at 38 Campbell St at 7.30 p.m. All members are invited to attend.

SUBSCRIPTIONS 1992

Single \$12; Family \$18; Student/pensioner \$8; Supporting member \$20
Newsletter posted: subscription plus \$6

SUPPER: April: L Perkins and K Mather.

COMMITTEE: Barbara Maund (pres), George Broadway (vp), Brenda Envall (vp), Maggie Oliver (sec), Chris Norwood (treas), Shirley Parnaby, Rita Mills (Newsletter & Pub officer), Kaye Turner (programs), Beris Perry, Chris Morris, Clodagh Norwood and Ern Perkins (asst newsletter).